

# HERO PRIESTS OF THE WAR—BY THE REV. DR. PETER GUILDAY

## FATHER WILLIAM FINN, HERO OF DARDANELLES



Father Finn.

WELL done, the Dubs! Your deeds will live in history!"

Said Gen. Weston, commander of the division, in an address at Gallipoli to the Dublin Fusiliers after fifteen days of continuous fighting. "You have achieved the impossible. When I first visited this place with the staff we all thought a landing could never be made. But you did it. The impossibilities were overcome. I am proud to be in command of such a regiment."

Gen. Weston was cheering up his men because he knew they were unusually depressed by the loss of a man who was the idol of the famous old fighting Fusiliers. He made no reference to their sorrow, for they all felt that the memory of it was too poignant to be recalled just then. Their minds and hearts were all on one and the same scene. Their own gallantry was forgotten in the remembrance of that little man in khaki with a priest's collar and the ascetic face of a student who had died with these words on his lips: "Are our fellows winning?"

Aye, they were winning; winning after one of the bloodiest engagements of the war, but in Father William Finn, their chaplain, they had lost their best friend. He was loved by them all from General down to the youngest soldier in the ranks.

It was on Thursday, April 8, that the transport Ansonia sailed for Gallipoli. On board there were two clergymen, Father William Finn, the Catholic chaplain, and the Rev. H. C. Foster, the Church of England chaplain, to the second Naval Brigade. Shortly after the young priest's death at Gallipoli Mr. Foster wrote an appreciation of his gallant conduct, his blameless character and the gentleness of his disposition.

"To see him quietly at work among his own men of the Dublin Fusiliers," writes Mr. Foster, "gave one a clue as to why this courageous priest was so respected and beloved. He always had a sympathetic ear for the trials, tribulations, difficulties and troubles of his men, and he was ever ready and tired of the somewhat monotonous life on board the transport, he was ready with an amusing tale and a cheery word; so much so that the Irish soldiers as usual twisted his name a bit and he became widely known as 'Father Billy O'Flynn of the Dublin Fusiliers.'"

"I know," said the Rev. Mr. Foster, "that he helped his men to live purer and better lives. He called his daily mass his 'Few Words,' and one thing is certain—his talks will not be forgotten by those who were so fortunate as to hear them. Many of his latter addresses were on the subject of contrition, and he taught all his men a little act of contrition to use when they required it, and he asked them especially to repeat it if they were wounded and no priest was nigh: 'O my God, I am sorry that I have sinned against Thee, because Thou art so good, and I will not sin again.'"

Father William Finn is a fine figure on one of the glorious pages of English bravery. The Dardanelles had to be landed. That was the order from London, and the landing was to be made on the Gallipoli Peninsula. The horrors of that scene can scarcely be described.

The transports, filled with soldiers, mostly Irishmen, steamed as close to shore as possible, but kept outside the range of the Turkish guns. All along the shore they could see the thick lines of barbed wire, and behind the hills they knew that merciless engines of death had been erected with every range accurately fixed. The men were trained to catch the men as they landed, and the landing was to be made on the Gallipoli Peninsula. The horrors of that scene can scarcely be described.

The day appointed was Sunday, April 25 of this year. On the Saturday before their chaplain, Father Finn, and the landing was to be made on the Gallipoli Peninsula. The horrors of that scene can scarcely be described.

For the reason, says a recent writer, "that he is a praying man the Irish Catholic soldier is a fine fighting man."

And now it turns out that the Irish Catholic priest is the finest fighting man of them all. Up to this great war the world has hardly known its Catholic priesthood. Now the men have come into their own. No consideration of danger has kept the Catholic chaplain in this present war from administering the last sacraments to the men dying in the trenches. Besides binding up the wounds of the fallen soldiers he has the important duty on his hands of exhorting their souls with a courage like his own.

Those who are not conventionalists with him or his men recognize this powerful influence and every liberty is given him in all the different armies now at war in Europe to exercise his spiritual sway over his soldiers. The Catholic men in all the armies want their priest near them. They want to know that he will come to them if they are mortally wounded; they kneel in battalions and sometimes in whole divisions to receive absolution from his lips, after they have offered up to God in a body an act of contrition for whatever they have done against His divine law. This is real religion and this is the courage which is born only in a Christian heart.

Mass is said wherever possible—a door laid on two trestles will often serve for an altar and two tiny candles at either end, sometimes stuck in the muzzles of two rifles. The soldiers cover the altar with evergreens or flowers if there is time, and the highest officer present will serve the mass like a little child. It is one of the most inspiring sights of the present war to see entire divisions of men, who up to this time in most cases have neglected God and the things of God, kneel with bowed heads at the benediction.

The chaplain hears confessions in the trenches, in ruined houses, along the roadside and in the open fields anywhere that the men are, and the men avow openly that they will go to death unafraid, if he is known to be near. There is also a beautiful spirit of comradeship between the representatives of the different religions—the Jewish rabbi and Protestant ministers in the several armies and the Catholic priest meet on the same broad plane of spiritual consideration for their men, one helping the other.

The future historian of the war will find many singular and somewhat amusing occurrences in this fraternal assistance between the representatives of the different creeds.

"You ask me," says Canon Moretto of the Seventeenth Regiment of the French line—a veteran of the war of '70—"to give you some details for publication. You must know that I am little inclined to see my poor prose in print, but there is an incident of the type you mention—this mutual assistance between the clergy of the different armies, which has an edifying side."

"It has often happened to me to give absolution to groups of the enemy's wounded. Many times it is impossible to separate the Catholics from the Protestants, and so I give absolution to the entire group after exhorting them in German to form an act of contrition in their hearts. Often I read word by word in German an act of contrition to them and both Catholics and Protestants join with me, and then I give absolution to them all. It is an exceptional thing, I admit, mais quel conchez-vous?"

"During the first days of the battle of the Marne our regiment took many prisoners, mostly Protestants from Saxony. I sent for the French Protestant chaplain of our corps to assist his wounded coreligionists, but he neither understood nor spoke German. Let him blame me who will, but I acted as interpreter for him and translated his French exhortation into German for their comfort. 'Tell them this! Tell them that,' he kept on saying to me, and I did so."

"The most scrupulous theologian might have found grammatical errors in my translation, but no dogmatic ones! I admit in the beginning I had my doubts, but now the moment I find a Protestant among the enemy's wounded I speak to him of God and heaven and without counting him the least embarrassment about his own faith I prepare him if necessary for death."

The Rev. Mr. Foster corroborates this



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mutual spirit of peace: "Many a pleasant talk have I had with Father Finn, pacing up and down the deck of the Ansonia, and I remember that the topics we discussed were many and various, and included the Oxford Movement, Cardinal Newman, Pusey, the Cowley Fathers and our future landing on a hostile shore. His sympathy and kindness to me I shall never forget. He was broad minded and always thoughtful of others."

"He celebrated mass on the fore well deck beneath a big tarpaulin, and always had an excellent attendance. He put this place at my disposal at 7 A. M. on Sunday mornings and did everything in his power to help me."

The Dublin Fusiliers had made their peace with God on Saturday morning, April 24, the day of Father Finn's last mass. They had been, as it were, reborn with a courage not of this world's making, and like the Irish Guards at Curragh (where Michael O'Leary won the Victoria Cross in February, 1915), who knelt with their chaplain in the trenches a few minutes in silent prayer and then sprang to their feet and dashed across the exposed space which

separated them from the enemy, who was hurling a murderous fire into their ranks, routing the enemy at the point of the bayonet—like this, their countrymen, the Dublin Fusiliers, their hearts at rest with God, silently took their places on the old collier, the River Clyde, which was waiting for them and set out for the shore.

As they reached the shore in the faint dawn of that Sunday morning not a sound was heard save the muffled noise of the engines. The chaplains were ordered not to land with the men, but to wait until the next day, when

the positions would be in the hands of the British. Father Finn, the chaplain of another division which landed on the shore further north at the same time with the Dublin Fusiliers, writes: "However, I disregarded orders and sneaked off with my men, and it was fortunate for many a dying man that I was ashore that morning. Had I known the inferno I was rushing into I believe I should have remained behind."

Father Finn was on another destroyer with the Munster Brigade. He had seen Father Finn that morning

and bade him good-by in case anything should happen to either of them. He landed with his men, and in his description of the scenes which ensued, of which he has written recently in a letter to a New York priest, we can realize the terrible danger Father Finn was facing.

"It was 4:30 A. M. and there was a faint glimmer of dawn in the eastern sky. The destroyer next to us began to man her boats and suddenly inferno broke loose from shore. Such a fearful hail of bullets from rifle, machine gun and shrapnel as passes all imagination! It was appalling."

"There was no cover. We were packed so closely together that one bullet would wound or kill three men, and we could not hit back, for the enemy was invisible. The bullets were dancing off the funnels and upper parts of the destroyers. The order was given us to man the boats and we tumbled in as fast as possible and pushed off for the shore."

"It was only 300 yards away, but to me it seemed miles and to have taken hours to reach. There was dreadful slaughter in the boats. I could then see only what was happening in my own. First the 'cox' was shot; then an oarsman fell dead across my feet; then a bullet came through the waist and grazed the puttee on my leg; then another of the men collapsed without a sound, and we knew that he was dead, and so on. It was horrible. I never expected to reach the shore alive."

"There was only one anxiety among the men—to reach the shore and rush to the Turkish bayonet. After the boat touched bottom about twenty yards from the beach. As I jumped up to get out a bullet went through the sleeve of my jacket and caught the lad behind me. A shrapnel splashed a man's brains over me. Another caught the jaw of the lad between my knees as I was getting out and nearly blinded me with splinters."

"I was pushed from behind and fell into about four feet of water. I went promptly to the bottom, and being loaded with a pack, three days' rations, a water bottle and an overcoat I found the utmost difficulty in rising. I almost thought I had been shot. I never realized till then how difficult it is to walk quickly through water dressed."

"I got on the beach exhausted and had to lie down among the falling bullets to get my breath. I had made my mind by this time that I had but poor chance of getting through the morning alive. Anyhow I picked up a flat stone and held it in front of my head and it was fortunate I did so, because a bullet that would have blinded me glanced harmlessly off it."

"I moved forward then to where the tide had made a little bank along the shore. All the soldiers carry a small trenching tool, but being a non-combatant I had none. I tore up the sand with my bare fingers and made a little shelter in front of me. I never felt so small in my life. I felt as if I could squeeze myself into a thimble. I must admit that I felt a little cowardly, but it was only for a few minutes."

"The lad on my left, not feeling safe, raised himself a little and began to dig with his trenching tool. A shell shot through the heart. The man on the other side of me got a bullet in the thigh and was in great pain. I pulled him toward me, and lying flat as I was, cut his trousers open and put on a dressing. Every soldier carries a little bottle of iodine and a field dressing, which can be applied in a few minutes."

"I had a look around then and saw all the other boats landing. They were suffering just as much as our boats had suffered. The beach was strewn with dead and wounded. Two boats landed about fifty yards from each other. They held fifty soldiers each but only twenty men were left altogether. They came under the fire of a Maxim gun, which can rattle off about 600 shots a minute."

"But these twenty had their revenge; they captured the gun and overpowered every man of the crew. So far only a few minutes had elapsed from the time we left the destroyer, and as there was a good number of men ashore the order was given: 'Fix bayonets and charge!' I could hear the click of the bayonets fitting on to the rifles, and then in the semi-darkness our men gave a shout of triumph and cheer and rushed to the shore."

"Poor fellows! Had they seen it in broad daylight they would never have attempted it. Military experts say that it is one of the most famous charges in history. It is almost incredible that they could have dug out the Turkish fort such an impossible position in so short a time. My first impulse was to grab a rifle and bayonet and go with them. The cheering and yelling would do your heart good to hear. But after clearing the first ridge I saw so many wounded and dying that I had to turn my attention to them."

While Father Finn was going through these exciting experiences Father Finn was still aboard the steamer River Clyde, to which his men had been transferred from the trans-

## WHO DR. GUILDAY IS.

It is from the standpoint of one who loves the Old World with all its delicate beauty, and whose sympathies are equally divided between all the noble men and women of the different countries now in the death struggle of a stupendous war, that Dr. Guilday approaches this, to him, sacred subject of the ecclesiastical heroes of the present war. As a contributor to the pages of many of the leading reviews and as one of the young professors at the Catholic University of America, at Washington, D. C., Dr. Guilday's name is known already to a host of readers.

In the long line of Doctors graduated from the University at Louvain, Belgium, since its foundation, in 1265, Dr. Guilday was the last. He is an American, born in Chester, Pa., of American parents, thirty-two years of age. Besides studying at Louvain, he was at the University of Bonn, Germany, and lectured in Europe before learned societies in German, Italian and French. Dr. Guilday was in Belgium when the war broke out and immediately after he had taken his degree he was summoned back to America.

His preparations to return to America after such a long absence were hastened by the outbreak of the war in August, 1914. Belgium was then in the midst of that gallant defence of her altars and firesides which went down in a blaze of glory at Liege and Namur; and among the first to fall before the invading hosts of Germany were some of Dr. Guilday's closest friends of university days.

For valued assistance in the preparation of the five articles by the Rev. Dr. Guilday, which appear in this series, indebtedness is gratefully acknowledged to Cardinal Gibbons, Cardinal Bourne, Cardinal Mercier and Archbishop Prendergast of Philadelphia.

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port. The plan decided upon was as follows: The steamer was to run as close to the shore as possible and then the men were to emerge from doors cut in the bows of the ship; they were to jump quickly on to the lighters, which formed a sort of gateway between the River Clyde and the shore, and then to cut the barbed wire and assault the forts at the point of the bayonet.

The moment the doors opened the plan was carried out with success, but in cutting through the barbed wire much time was lost and a horrible rain of shells from the Turkish forts was let loose. In a hail of bullets, shrapnel and machine gun fire the first section of the Dublin Fusiliers dropped like leaves on the beach.

Father Finn could not hold himself back any longer. In spite of the orders—which were given only for the purpose of sparing him as long as possible to his men—he ran to the commanding officer and begged to be allowed to go ashore with his soldiers. The commanding officer, whose eyes were filled with tears at the terrible spectacle on the beach where the Fusiliers were being butchered in hundreds by their unseen foes, could not withstand the eloquent pleading of the little Irish priest, but he appealed to him not to go ashore until things had quieted down. Father Finn replied:

"A priest's place is beside the dying soldier!"

Without waiting for an answer he stepped from the bow of the River Clyde onto the lighter and ran toward the shore to the nearest group of fallen Fusiliers. He had run only many yards before a bullet hit him in the chest and the spirit of blood which followed told him he was badly wounded. Another bullet hit him in the thigh as he kept on, and still another in the breast.

By the time he had reached his men he was literally riddled with shot. One hand had been torn by a shell, but disabled as he was and in spite of the terrible pain he was suffering, he crawled along the beach from dying man to dying man, giving absolution and consolation to every one. A piece of shrapnel shot off what was left of his right hand as he was blessing one dying soldier, and lying on his side he gave blessings and absolutions with his left.

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"Are our fellows winning?"

When the news of his death reached London Lord Kitchener sent a message of confidence to his brother and the King and Queen, and the sympathy to the family. In his native town it was written of him:

"All ranks have recently figured in the lists of honored dead—generals, colonels, majors, captains, lieutenants, sergeants, corporals and privates. But it was not until yesterday that we had the mortal remains of one of our chaplains. Had he been in action. To many of us it had an all too sad interest. For it was decreed that the first representative of those whose mission it is to preach peace and good will among men, but who to their credit gladly share the hardships and dangers of battle, should be the first to fall in their dying hours, should surrender their life in the operation on the Dardanelles, and that it should be Father William Finn, late of Middleborough Cathedral."

"He has paid the penalty not only of his patriotism but of his love for the Catholic soldier. None of us can help feeling that there is something incongruous in this intellectual and sane too robust priest being killed in war. The study rather than the battle-field seemed to be his natural home."

"Yet when the religious interest of a growing army necessitated extra chaplains none responded to the call more readily or enthusiastically than he did. That he won with the hearts of the gallant men he went forth to serve is certain. It is hard to realize that he is no more, that his Church and diocese have lost forever his enthusiasm and devotion."

"But these are days when we must prepare ourselves for a submission to such losses. Father Finn died nobly in the service of his fellow-men."

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DECLARATION UNNEUTRAL.

Congressman Julius Kahn of California was picked to read the Declaration of Independence at the Fourth of July celebration at the San Francisco fair. There was a big crowd and a good deal of confusion, and notwithstanding Kahn's excellent enunciation many could hear only a faint babble of words. Kahn turned to a companion and said in a hurt tone: "What's Kahn mean by getting of all that noisy party stuff?"

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